



<https://asce-uok.edu.pk/journal>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56384/jes.v40i2.348>

## Cultural Debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century on Declining Multiculturalism in Europe

Rabia Mansoor\*

### Abstract

*This article examines the evolving dynamics of cultural cohesion and conflict within the context of three intersecting theoretical frameworks: the decline of multiculturalism, the resurgence of asabiyyah, and the predicted clashes of civilizations. In recent years, multicultural policies, which aim to promote universal harmonious coexistence among diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, have faced significant challenges. These challenges have sparked a debate over whether such policies have inadvertently assisted deeper divisions rather than integration, leading to a perceived collapse in their efficacy. This article intends to explore how the revival of strong group identities and the tensions intensified by struggling multicultural policies might steer the global community toward Huntington's predicted clashes among the civilizations. Through an analysis of recent international events, sociological theory, and demographic trends, it is an attempt to provide an understanding of how current global conflicts and cultural policies might be realigning to fit Huntington's and Khaldun's visions, offering insights into potential pathways toward mitigating these deep-seated conflicts and boosting a more cohesive global society.*

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, *Asabiyyah*, Clash of Civilizations, Ibn Khaldun, Samuel P. Huntington, Social cohesion, Group solidarity

### Introduction

*The fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.<sup>1</sup>*

---

\* Ms. Rabia Mansoor is an Independent Researcher, based in Karachi. Email: [srabiam@gmail.com](mailto:srabiam@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington. "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, No. 3 (1993): 22-49.

In the contemporary political global landscape, the complicated bond between different cultures and customs under multiculturalism has reached a critical juncture. Once celebrated as the pinnacle of progressive policy, multiculturalism now faces rigorous scrutiny. At present, the Ukrainian-Russia war, the rise of China, and Brexit populism with nationalist sentiments are thriving in Europe, India, and other parts of the world. It has gained the attention of scholars to revisit theories on social and cultural changes, conflict and coexistence.

### **The decline of Multiculturalism**

Globally, multiculturalism was proclaimed as a mechanism to enhance tolerance and understanding among varied cultural and racial groups. Despite its intentions, it is increasingly apparent that multiculturalism is struggling. Although monoculturalism has been proposed as an alternative, it faces its own set of challenges, including demographic changes, emigration, and the erosion of liberal universal values and tolerance among various communities.<sup>2</sup> Multiculturalism attempts to reconcile fundamentally opposing elements by celebrating diverse cultural identities and fostering a unified societal or national identity. It seeks to promote tolerance, respect, and understanding across different cultural and ethnic lines while maintaining unity and cohesion. Nonetheless, it remains more theoretical than practical.

This crack between the theory and the reality is attributed to a range of socio-political and economic factors that have challenged the efficacy and acceptance of multicultural policies. Economic recessions and scarce resource competition often heighten tensions among different cultural groups. In the era of economic stress, such as during the financial crisis of 2008 or the recent global downturns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, multiculturalism has often been scapegoated for various social and economic despairs. These lead to fears, implying that immigrants and minorities are burdening social services and job opportunities, inflaming xenophobic sentiments.<sup>3</sup>

The rise in global terrorism, particularly events linked to extremist ideologies, has had a profound impact on perceptions of Western

---

<sup>2</sup> Rattansi Ali. *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Zeihan. *The End of the World is just the Beginning: Mapping the Collapse of Globalization* (Harper Business, 2022).

multiculturalism. High-profile terrorist attacks in cities like New York, London, Paris, and Madrid have shifted multicultural comprehension.<sup>4</sup> Many perceive a direct link between immigration from Muslim-majority countries to these activities. This association, often fuelled by stereotyping and prejudice, further polarizes opinions on multiculturalism.

The lack of integration of immigrants into the hosting society and its national fabric challenges social cohesion, which is often the biggest challenge in multicultural societies. Language barriers, economic disparities, and social exclusion steer minority communities to be isolated or marginalized. This lack of cohesion breeds resentment and misunderstanding among different community groups, undermining the goals of multiculturalism.

Throughout the 21st century, multiculturalism has faced significant scrutiny and mixed outcomes globally. In Europe, where different models were adopted, the idea of integration refers to becoming part of the larger society without forsaking their unique cultural identities like in Britain, while assimilation is the absorption into the dominant culture, losing their original cultural identities as in France, and interculturalism in some European cities promoting interaction and mutual exchange, where cultural differences are not only acknowledged but also seen as an opportunity for learning and growth; still intense debates and criticisms have emerged due to failures in unifying diverse populations adequately, alongside issues like economic disparity and security concerns.

Although Canada is often viewed as a successful model of multiculturalism,<sup>5</sup> it endorsed a Cultural Mosaic Model that emphasizes the importance of various cultural communities retaining their unique identity and values within a unified society where the government actively supports cultural preservation through policies and funding. It, too, has faced its challenges, including controversies over balancing cultural diversity with a unified national identity and occasional cultural conflicts.

In the United States, where traditionally, a Melting Pot Model was adopted that promoted the idea of assimilation, where all immigrants and cultural

---

<sup>4</sup> R. Chin. *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Tepperman. *The Fix: How Nations Survive and Thrive in a World in Decline* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

groups are encouraged to assimilate into the dominant culture, was moved to a Salad Bowl Model that allows individual cultures to maintain their unique identities, and characteristics while coexisting harmoniously; there were also discussions and arguments around multiculturalism closely linked with immigration and national identity debates.<sup>6</sup>

In places like Australia and New Zealand, official multicultural policies are in place. However, they have not been without controversies, especially concerning the integration of indigenous peoples and minority communities. In Africa, multiculturalism manifests in the coexistence of diverse ethnic and cultural groups within countries. While some countries celebrate this diversity, others struggle with ethnic conflicts and tensions. South America presents a diverse cultural landscape where multiculturalism is evident due to historical migrations and indigenous heritage. However, inequality and discrimination against ethnic and indigenous groups continue to be issues in some areas. Some Asian countries have adopted multiculturalism, recognizing their cultural and linguistic diversity. Yet, they also encounter ethnic and religious tensions, raising questions on the depth of their commitment to multiculturalism.

In Asia, due to the diverse political, historical, and social landscapes, the Multinational Model is customized, recognizes the distinct status of different ethnic groups within the country, and grants them certain autonomous powers or recognition. This tailored model is notable for countries like Pakistan, India, and China, with explicit provisions for regional autonomy and special administrative statutes to accommodate diverse groups. It has faced challenges and criticism as well, especially, in Pakistan and India, which have complex structures of linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity.

During the last decade, one of the most critical factors in the fading of Multiculturalism is due to the change in demographic trends within global societies.<sup>7</sup> The shifts in population dynamics are highly impacting the utility and reception of multicultural policies and attitudes. The demographic shifts are principally due to the ageing population. In many developed countries, populations are ageing rapidly due to lower birth rates and higher life expectancy. This demographic trend can lead to a generational divide in the practice of multicultural society. Older generations may have different

---

<sup>6</sup> Chin, R. *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*.

<sup>7</sup> Zeihan. *The End of the World is just the Beginning*.

cultural experiences and perspectives compared to younger, more diverse generations, potentially leading to resistance against multicultural policies. Secondly, migration patterns have dramatically altered the demographic makeup of many nations, particularly in Europe, from Asian and African countries. The same can be said about North America where migration from Latin America has resulted in demographic changes. While immigration can enrich a country culturally, rapid changes in the ethnic and cultural composition of neighbourhoods and cities might lead to social tension and a backlash against multicultural ideals, especially, if the native population feels their cultural identity is being overshadowed or threatened. Thirdly, most Asian nations face internal migration due to rapid urbanization and economic developments.<sup>8</sup> The urban division, in contrast to the rural division, is often a demographic divide between metropolitan areas, which tend to be more culturally diverse, and rural areas, which may remain more homogeneous. This can lead to differing views on multiculturalism, with urban populations generally showing more acceptance and rural populations exhibiting scepticism or resistance.

### **The Resurgence of Asabiyyah**

Ibn Khaldun is a 14th-century Arab scholar who is often considered one of the founding figures in the fields of history, sociology, economics, and demography. His most famous work, the *Muqaddimah* (meaning 'introduction' in Arabic), is recognized for its methodological innovations and profound insights into the functioning of human societies, economics, and the rise and fall of civilizations, as well as several groundbreaking ideas.<sup>9</sup>

Ibn Khaldun's ideas were ahead of time, particularly his thoughts on social cohesion and conflict, the dynamics of group solidarity (*asabiyyah*), and the economic factors influencing the development and decay of civilizations. Khaldunian studies charter various fields in academics and interdisciplinary application with sociological and economic theories, methodological approach to history, and economic and government processes, and how his theories can be applied to understand modern societal dynamics, historical processes, and cultural evolutions in various contemporary contexts.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Tony Street and Nadja Germann. "Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Language and Logic", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition).

<sup>10</sup> Annalisa Verza. "The Senility of Group Solidarity and Contemporary Multiculturalism: A Word of Warning from a Medieval Arabic Thinker." *Ratio Juris* 32, No. 1 (2019): 76-101.

Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyyah* translates from Arabic to social cohesion or group solidarity. This concept is central to Ibn Khaldun's understanding of the dynamics that enable a group or society to achieve and maintain political power. *Asabiyyah* refers to the social unity and adherence that binds individuals in a group together through shared values, interests, and purposes. Ibn Khaldun premised and postulated that *asabiyyah* is strongest in blood relations or kinship groups, such as tribes and clans, where familial ties reinforce trust and loyalty. However, *asabiyyah* is not limited to flesh and blood or fraternity; it can also form among non-kin groups based on shared purposes or goals.

Ibn Khaldun further used the concept of *asabiyyah* to explain the rise and fall of dynasties and states.<sup>11</sup> He argued that nomadic tribes, with their strong *asabiyyah*, often conquer civilizations that have become decadent and weakened by luxury, indulgence, and corruption. Once in power, these tribes established a new dynasty and regime. However, as the dynasty grows older and more established, its *asabiyyah* brotherhood tends to weaken. Over time, this leads to the decline of the lineage and dynasty's power and eventually to its overthrow by a new group with stronger *asabiyyah*. This cyclical process reflects Ibn Khaldun's view of history as a series of rises and falls that is driven by *asabiyyah*.

Ibn Khaldun illustrates that the strength of social unity- *asabiyyah* often diminishes in urban settings.<sup>12</sup> He argued that the complexities of city life and the abundance of resources in urban areas reduce the need for strong social bonds that are necessary in the harsher, more perilous, and precarious environments of the desert or rural rustic regions. In cities, individuals can rely more on institutions and laws rather than familial or group bonds, leading to a weakening of *asabiyyah*.

It can lead to stronger community bonds and social support within groups, but it can also intensify social divisions and conflicts between different groups. It is particularly challenging to interpret how modern societies are

---

<sup>11</sup> Murat Önder and Fatih Ulaşan. "Ibn Khaldun's Cyclical Theory on the Rise and Fall of Sovereign Powers: The Case of Ottoman Empire," *Adam Academy Journal of Social Sciences* 8, No. 2 (2018): 231-266.

<sup>12</sup> Syed Farid Alatas. "A Khaldunian Perspective on the Dynamics of Asiatic Societies." *Comparative Civilizations Review* (1993): 29-51.

witnessing a revival of strong group loyalties that mirror Khaldun's observations about the dynamics of rise and power in societies.

In contemporary terms, the modern resurgence of *asabiyyah* can be seen manifesting in various forms, like nationalism and patriotism.<sup>13</sup> In the face of globalization, there is a notable resurgence in nationalism and patriotism, which can be viewed as a form of *asabiyyah*. This revivification is often a reaction to perceived threats from outside forces, such as economic instability, cultural dilution or political interference from supranational entities like the European Union. Nationalist movements in countries like the UK (Brexit), the US (during the Trump administration), and across Europe reflect a collective rallying for sovereignty and national unity. This modern renaissance of *asabiyyah* can be witnessed as community and local movements. Beyond the national level, there is also a growing emphasis on localism and community-centred movements, which seek to strengthen local economies, preserve local cultures, and promote community solidarity.

### **The Clash of Civilizations**

Huntington's thesis argues that the fundamental sources of conflict in the global political landscape would no longer be primarily ideological or economic but cultural.

He induced that with the end of the Cold War, cultural and religious identities would become the primary drivers of disagreement. He identified several major global civilizations, including Western, Islamic, Hindu, Sinic (Chinese), Japanese, Orthodox (primarily Russian), Latin American, and potentially African. According to him, the interactions among these civilizations, particularly with their cultural boundaries and expectations, would be the focal points of international contention, also added that future wars would be fought not between countries but between cultural blocks.

His predictions refer to the response to the global geopolitical landscape following the Cold War, which points out the world's future conflicts and alignments. He insisted on the value of civilizational identity. He argued that in the post-Cold War world, the primary sources of global conflict would shift from ideological or economic but instead would be cultural. People's cultural and religious identities would be the primary source of approaching

---

<sup>13</sup> Annalisa Verza. "The Senility of Group Solidarity and Contemporary Multiculturalism."

conflicts. According to his approach, the world is divided into different cultural blocks. He identified major civilizations such as Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations according to their religious and cultural characteristics. He predicted that the clashes between these civilizations, the central points of these international tensions, would be primarily at the points where their borders intersect. These are the fault lines between these, the cultural fault lines separating the civilizations. The precedent he sets includes the conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the Balkans, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Further, he proposed the notion of reliance between the "Core States" and "Kin-Country". Each civilization would have one or more "core states" that act as its central and most influential representatives. Like the US for the West, Russia for the Slavic-Orthodox, and China for the Confucian states. He also suggested that conflicts would prompt "kin countries" from the same civilization to facilitate and aid their cultural kin and counterparts, broadening a regional conflict into a larger civilizational confrontation.

He indicates that the struggles between civilizations can also be attributable to the difference in the concept of modernization compared to Westernization. The distinction was made between modernization as a state's economic and social progress and Westernization as the adoption of Western cultural and aesthetic values. He argued that while many non-Western societies might modernize, they would not necessarily adopt Western philosophy and values, leading to a cultural divide and potential clashes with the West and the rest. Similarly, the "torn countries" with divided cultural identities, such as Turkey or Russia, could face significant internal strife over their civilizational alignment with their respective civilizations.

As predicted by Huntington, the intensification of civilizational identities might lead to increased tensions and conflicts. It would mainly focus on how these tensions manifest at the "fault lines" between civilizations and how core states within these civilizations respond to internal and external pressures.



### **Multiculturalism and Khaldun's *Asabiyyah* as a response to civilizational clashes**

The “clash of civilizations” theory and multiculturalism represent two distinct perspectives on cultural interactions and their effect on a globalized expanding society. While they have some contrasting views, it is important to note that the clash of civilizations theory speculations seem to be the answer to the collapse of multiculturalism in the post-9/11 era. It suggests that different civilizations, defined by their cultural and religious identities, will clash due to deep-seated differences. The failure of multiculturalism supports this premise. The failure of multiculturalism indicates that cultural and religious differences and backgrounds are undiminishable.

He pointed out that “People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribe, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations and at the broadest level, civilizations,”<sup>14</sup> mirroring the image of Khaldun’s “*asabiyyah*” and resonating with the discernment of the flop global multiculturalism experimentation under the arrangement of American-led globalization.

Multiculturalism as a social policy and philosophy promotes recognizing and appreciating cultural diversity within a society. It encourages accepting and celebrating diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds, advocating that this diversity enriches a society.

*asabiyyah* refers to the social cohesion and solidarity that bind individuals to a group, enabling collective action. Ibn Khaldun posited that civilizations rise and fall based on the strength of their *asabiyyah*. In contemporary settings, this concept can be seen in the resurgence of nationalism, regionalism, and identity politics, where perceived threats from outside forces often intensify group cohesion—economic, cultural, or political. This resurgence is a response to the challenges posed by globalization, which, while expanding economic opportunities and intercultural connections, also stresses local cultures and economies, leading groups to solidify their internal bonds to safeguard their unique identities.

---

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations*.

While his theory argued that future global conflicts would be defined not by ideological or economic differences but by cultural and religious differences, predicting that clashes would likely occur where these civilizations intersect. He also noted that the intensification of civilizational consciousness would lead to a world where cultural fault lines become battle lines.

As societies globally wrestle with the challenges posed by cultural diversity, there has been a noticeable shift away from multiculturalism as the predominant approach to managing this diversity. Concurrently, there has been a revival of *asabiyyah*, robust group solidarity, and intensifying cultural and political tensions worldwide, steering towards a civilizational clash.

The association between these systems, *asabiyyah* and Huntington's civilizational clashes, becomes clear when considering how internal group solidarity (*asabiyyah*) can escalate into civilizational conflicts. In India, *asabiyyah* manifests strongly within various social and religious groups, contributing to a sense of cohesion and collective identity among members. This intra-group solidarity is within caste groups, religious communities, and ethnic groups. These forms of *asabiyyah* are often reinforced by social practices, religious rituals, and community networks that strengthen internal cohesion and set the boundaries defining group membership. Civilizational clashes can be applied to India's strategic and cultural interactions on both a regional and global scale. He classified India as part of the "Hindu" civilization, which interacts with the "Islamic" civilization and "Sinic" (Chinese) civilization.<sup>15</sup> These interactions are evident in the longstanding conflict with Pakistan, placed within the Islamic civilization, and the growing geopolitical tensions with China.

At a domestic level, the idea of civilizational clashes is reflected in the occasional communal violence among Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities, which can be interpreted as clashes at cultural fault lines. These clashes are sometimes inflamed by political rhetoric and policies that may reinforce communal identities and heighten tensions.

The interplay of *asabiyyah* and civilizational clashes in India can lead to significant social and political challenges. Strong in-group solidarity within religious or ethnic groups can sometimes escalate into communalism, where

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

allegiance to one's group overrides broader social harmony. Additionally, the *asabiyyah* within India's diverse communities often impact its foreign policy and international relations influencing how India navigates its position relative to neighbours like Pakistan and China.

### **Conclusion**

The interwoven narratives of multiculturalism's challenges, the resurgence of *asabiyyah*, and the valued prospect of Huntington's civilizational clashes present a complex tapestry of global cultural dynamics. The correlation among deteriorating multiculturalism, *asabiyyah*, and the clash of civilizations suggests that enhancing understanding and cooperation across cultural lines is crucial for international peace.

As we move deeper into the 21st century, the dialogue between different civilizations, empowered by a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, will be crucial in overcoming the challenges posed by cultural and civilizational divides.

In our contemporary post-modern world, where traditional markers of identification have lost their prominence, even so, people acknowledge and distinguish themselves on the grounds of their adhered ideologies, economic standing, and political affiliations, but also of their cultural attachments. People shape their identities using elements like ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutional connections. The most outstanding adherence is the cultural one; not just conventional and customary, but the trending pop culture is a subculture that is also now a considerable portion of cultural context globally. Popular culture, or pop culture, refers to the array of entertainment, fashion, trends, slang, and lifestyles that are mainstream within a society at any given point in time. It is highly dynamic, often influenced by and influencing society's collective preferences and behaviours.

During the last three decades, the key components of pop culture have been mass media including television, movies, music, and books, which are widely consumed by the general public. Technological development in the form of different gadgets and apps that gain mass appeal and influence daily life, such as smartphones, media social platforms, and video games, are also part of this culture. Slang and usages of language also created various subcultures

adding new jargon to everyday conversation. Likewise, sports and games became significant cultural symbols and moments.

Pop culture fountainheads are the manga, books, movies, music, musical videos, fashion, and, more recently, memes and viral content on social media outlets that quickly cross borders, influencing and creating a shared global culture of a distinct group. These subcultures of social groups affect the central culture of the society as these mirror the societal values, norms, and issues. It evolves and evolves again through cycles of evolution with the changing demographics, technological advancements, and societal norms. It also plays a crucial role in shaping identity and their adhering group, particularly among younger demographics, who may look up to pop culture figures as role models for political and social influence or be persuaded by the norms and values presented in the media. These emerging subcultures have a significant economic impact. Pop culture drives substantial economic activity. It influences consumer behaviour, from fashion purchases, streaming subscriptions, and gastronomic and culinary preferences to tourism, creating enormous revenue for different industrial sectors.

The rise of recent pop culture is now breaking the traditional boundaries of civilization and generating a novel identity and group singularity. It facilitates global interaction and exchange, breaking established norms and creating new group cohesion. However, it also lifts new conflicts and disagreements within this culture in the virtual world; its consequences can still be felt in the real world.

Hence, in the upcoming decade of deglobalization<sup>16</sup>, where the system set globally after WWII is deteriorating, the resources are perceived as limited, the worldwide demography is shifting, economic opportunities and political power are emerging differently; and cultural and civilizational clashes might take on a zero-sum game nature. If cultural groups or civilizations compete for dominance rather than coexistence, each group's gain could directly correspond to another's loss. The dynamics between multiculturalism, *asabiyyah*, and civilizational clashes have the potential to devolve into a zero-sum game, if managed poorly. Careful and sensitive handling with an emphasis on inclusivity and mutual benefit can lead to more prosperous and constructive outcomes. The complexity of these interactions necessitates a

---

<sup>16</sup> Zeihan, *The End of the World is just the Beginning*.

delicate approach that seeks to maximize the benefits for all involved, moving beyond zero-sum thinking towards creating shared values and common prosperity.